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ABSTRACT

Attacks on family life programs are generally directed toward the qualifications of teachers. Thus, the author focuses on the need for clarifying and refining current selection procedures, and points up that such procedures, in the past, have involved a combination of techniques with considerable reliance upon professional criteria. It is noted that in England selection methods emphasize the possession of personal attributes thought to be essential to successful counseling or teaching. The stress placed on professionalism and the acquisition of academic degrees in selection procedures in the United States is viewed as impairing the development and expansion of programs. The more sophisticated selected tests and scales utilized in other countries are recommended. A major challenge was posed to attempt an empirical evaluation of current U.S. procedures. Less dependence on professional criteria and greater emphasis upon personal attributes were recommended. (TL)

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CONSIDERATIONS IN THE USE OF INSTRUMENTS FOR THE SELECTION OF FAMILY LIFE EDUCATORS

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The need for clarification and refinement of the procedure for selecting family life teachers is a major concern of administrators of family life programs. The Executive Secretary of SIECUS commented in a professional meeting recently that many of the attacks on family life programs seem to be directed toward the qualifications or lack of qualifications of teachers.[1] SIECUS and the Department of Child Development at the University of Connecticut sponsored an International Seminar on the subject of the selection of family life teachers and marriage counselors in August of this year. Experts from Columbia, Australia, New Zealand, England and United States met at the University of Connecticut for four days to present papers and discuss various aspects of the selection of family life educators.

The procedures utilized in selecting family life teachers have remained essentially the same in United States throughout the period that courses have been taught in schools and colleges. The selection procedure has involved a combination of techniques with considerable reliance upon professional criteria as a basis for selection.[2] The

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first family teachers with encouragement from students and colleagues sought permission from school administrators to establish programs of study. Administrators probably considered the personal attributes of the person wishing to establish a program of study and attempted to make judgments as to what traits were significant in a family life program. In most instances the school administrator sought refuge in insistence that professional standards be met in some area of academic competence.[3] Professional standards for teaching family life courses have remained vague because of the newness of the field and the multi-disciplinary nature of the content material.[4] Recent articles in professional journals have discussed the feasibility of the self-selection approach.[5] Teachers who have been drafted against their wishes have contributed to the failure of some programs. It is obvious that teachers should want to be involved in a family life program if it is to succeed. The question that emerges, is the desire to teach a family life course a sufficient basis for selection? A further question that might be raised, is the most highly motivated person necessarily the most effective teacher?

The selection of family life teachers has proceeded in England, Canada, Australia and New Zealand on a different basis from the U.S.

"The National Marriage Guidance Council in England has, since its inception, relied on volunteers for both therapeutic counseling and education for marriage. Unlike other countries - and in particular North America - in Great Britian there has never been a traditional

academic and professional approach to the teaching and practice in these areas. Rather, they have been pre-empted according to a characteristically British tradition by a voluntary organization using skilled but nevertheless unpaid and essentially non-academic volunteers. This emphasis on using non-professional volunteers arose really because no other institution in society wished to provide either a therapeutic or educational service in this sphere."[6]

> The process of selecting counsellors is designed to recruit men and women able to undertake this part-time work in a variety of settings and to work with a wide age spread. It also recognizes that the amount of training received by those selected is comparatively short, albeit far, excess of training for any other form of voluntary social work in Britain. The training takes three forms. Initial training is based on six three-day residential sessions spread over the counsellor's first two years' work. This training provides an introduction to basic concepts but is primarily based on small group sensitivity methods. Counsellors are also required to attend regular case discussions with their colleagues throughout their counselling careers. These groups are led by psychiatrists, tutors or social workers.[7]

Family life teachers and marriage counselors have both been selected in much the same manner and it has been assumed that if an individual were qualified for one position that he was also qualified for the other.[8] In the United States a somewhat different basis has been utilized to select marriage counselors. Selection methods used in England place major emphasis upon the possession or lack of possession of those personal attributes thought to be essential to successful counseling or teaching. A prospective counselor is examined over a

period of several days by practicing counselors. The selection procedure involves interviewing, discussions, observations and probationary training. If a candidate is accepted, he is permitted to work in a specific locality but he would not necessarily retain his eligibility if he were to move to another city. The emphasis is upon possession of the particular attributes thought to be essential to functioning in a specific locality. When a person obtains employment in the United States after having attained certain professional standards he is usually considered to be eligible for employment in any city in which he might choose to live. Most teachers and counselors in England do not receive monetary compensation in contrast with the United States.

Counselors in England are frequently described as volunteers but this does not have the same connotation as in the United States. They might be described as individuals with professional training but in an area in which they do not have specific academic preparation. Family guidance programs in Australia, England and New Zealand have been in operation for 25 years and there are plans to continue with essentially the same selection procedures utilized in the past.

More opposition to family programs has been encountered in the United States than in other areas of the world. The problems of staffing programs have been more severe also.[9] It may be that some individuals with skills and knowledge related to family and social welfare might be utilized in the future if some innovation in the selection procedure were to occur. It is time to re-examine the emphasis that has been placed

upon professionalism in the United States as it relates to the selection of family life teachers.[10] The insistence upon certification by the acquisition of academic degrees has provided a false shield of protection that has actually impaired the development and expansion of programs.[11]

When programs are studied and compared on an international basis, there is consensus in regard to the personal attributes which family life teacher-counselor should possess. The attributes which are frequently listed are such traits as integrity, maturity, knowledge, honesty and a warm friendly personality.[12] Opinion does differ as to the relative significance that should be attached to personal attributes in the selection process but all are in accord that they are important.

There is agreement that certain personal characteristics such as having been divorced and never-married have been overrated in times past. Events such as these are not crucial if the person has worked out an adequate adjustment. Some individuals who because of serious mental problems may require the assistance of a psychiatrist and then recover completely. The mentally ill are not in a position to provide assistance to others at the time they themselves are mentally ill. The apprehension of family life teachers and administrators as to the possible negative effects of employing persons with characteristics such as a divorce has not produced the disasterous consequences that some predicted. The personal qualities possessed by an individual and the adjustment that has been achieved in a particular situation seem to be more significant.

The construction of tests and scales to be used as a part of the

selection process has been more sophisticated in England than in other areas. Extensive use has been made of standardized tests, and scales have been constructed to meet special needs. Formal tests have been used with interviews as a part of the selection process. Some observers question the significance of the test results and how they should be interpreted. There is considerable interest in a tool to assist school administrators in selecting family life teachers. Further testing and some refinement of the scoring procedure is needed.

The major challenge which faces all individuals intrusted with the selection of family life teachers is the need to attempt an empirical evaluation of the procedures being utilized.[13] Records relative to the selection procedure have been compiled for 25 years in New Zealand. Some information is available in Australia and England. The task is complicated and it will be difficult to conduct an evaluation, but it must be done. Longitudinal studies will be especially difficult to complete. Some have asked why we should conduct evaluation studies in family life when other disciplines are not called upon to present proof of quality. It will be difficult to conduct studies, and the determination of what constitutes quality will be even more complicated but because of the newness of the discipline studies must be conducted.

Programs in the United States might profit by reviewing the selection procedure being utilized in England and Australia. The utilization of a team approach in selecting family life teachers

appears to be feasible for the United States. This procedure might establish greater confidence and add dignity to the selection procedure. If the selection process were regarded as possessing rigor and based upon very high standards the attacks upon programs might be fewer. Less dependence upon the attainment of professional criteria and greater emphasis upon personal attributes might make it possible to utilize the talents and services of individuals in the fields of law, medicine, home economics, and religion who have a keen interest in marriage guidance. Some positions might be filled by this process that would otherwise remain vacant.

CONCLUSIONS

A comparative study of the selection process as it relates to family life teachers in various countries suggests that alternate procedures may be utilized. Greater emphasis has been placed upon professionalism in the United States than in other countries. The possession of personal attributes thought to be associated with counselling and teaching have been stressed in England, Australia and New Zealand. A re-examination of the selection process in the United States could result in changes which would increase the confidence in selection procedures without lowering the quality of family life teachers and counselors. The evaluation of selection procedures has been neglected in the past. A high priority must be assigned to the evaluation of selection procedures if the process is improved.

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